United Nations A/62/PV.52

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

Official Records

52nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 15 November 2007, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 a.m.

Agenda item 113

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(a) Election of seven members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

Note by the Secretary-General (A/62/77)

The President: Pursuant to General Assembly decision 42/450 of 17 December 1987 and upon nomination by the Economic and Social Council, the Assembly elects the members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

The Assembly has before it document A/62/77, which contains the nominations by the Economic and Social Council to fill the vacancies in the Committee that will occur as a result of the expiration, on 31 December 2007, of the terms of office of Algeria, China, Ghana, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya and the Republic of Korea. Those States are eligible for immediate re-election.

I should like to remind members that, after 1 January 2008, the following States will still be members of the Committee: Argentina, Armenia, Belarus, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, the Central African Republic, the Comoros, Cuba, France, Haiti, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Pakistan, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Therefore, those 25 States are not eligible in this election.

I should now like to inform members that the following States have been nominated by the Economic and Social Council: the three African States for three vacancies are Kenya, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Niger; the three Asian States for three vacancies are Bangladesh, China and the Republic of Korea; and the one Latin American and Caribbean State for one vacancy is Jamaica.

In accordance with rule 92 of the rules of procedure, all elections should be held by secret ballot and there shall be no nominations. However, I should like to recall paragraph 16 of General Assembly decision 34/401, whereby the practice of dispensing with the secret ballot for elections to subsidiary organs when the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled should become standard, unless a delegation specifically requests a vote on a given election.

In the absence of such a request, may I take it that the Assembly decides to proceed to the election on the basis of dispensing with the secret ballot?

It was so decided.

The President: The number of States nominated from among the African States, the Asian States and the Latin American and Caribbean States is equal to the number of seats to be filled in each of those groups.

May I therefore take it that the Assembly wishes to declare those States nominated by the Economic and

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Social Council from among the African States, the Asian States and the Latin American and Caribbean States, namely, Bangladesh, China, Jamaica, Kenya, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Niger and the Republic of Korea, elected members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

The President: I congratulate the States that have just been elected members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

Members will recall that from previous sessions, and as indicated in document A/62/77, there remain two vacancies in the Group of Western European and other States for members whose term of office would begin on the date of election. One term will expire on 31 December 2008 and the other on 31 December 2009. The General Assembly will be in a position to act on those vacancies upon the nomination by the Economic and Social Council of two Member States from that region.

We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 113.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey), Vice-President, took the Chair.

(b) Election of twenty-nine members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

The Acting President: Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972 and Assembly decision 43/406 of 24 October 1988, the Assembly will proceed to the election of 29 members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, to replace those members whose term of office expires on 31 December 2007.

The 29 outgoing members are the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Hungary, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sweden, Turkey, Tuvalu, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Republic of Tanzania. Those States are also eligible for immediate re-election.

I should like to remind members that, after 1 January 2008 the following States will still be members of the Governing Council: Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Germany, Haiti, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, the United States of America and Uruguay. Therefore, those 29 States are not eligible in this election.

As members know, in accordance with rule 92 of the rules of procedure, all elections shall be held by secret ballot and there shall be no nominations. However, I should like to recall paragraph 16 of General Assembly decision 34/401, whereby the practice of dispensing with the secret ballot for elections to subsidiary organs when the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled should become standard, unless a delegation specifically requests a vote on a given election.

In the absence of such a request, may I take it that the Assembly decides to proceed to the election on that basis?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Regarding candidatures, I have been informed by the Chairmen of the regional groups that for the eight seats from the African States, the eight endorsed candidates are Benin, the Congo, Guinea, Mali, Mauritius, the Niger, Somalia and Tunisia.

For the seven seats from the Asian States, the seven endorsed candidates are Bangladesh, Fiji, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and Tuvalu.

For the three seats from the Eastern European States, the three endorsed candidates are Belarus, Croatia and Hungary.

For the five seats from the Latin American and Caribbean States, the five endorsed candidates are the Bahamas, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba and Mexico.

For the six seats from the Western European and other States, the six endorsed candidates are Finland, Israel, Italy, Monaco, the Netherlands and Spain.

Since the number of candidates endorsed by the African States, the Asian States, the Eastern European States, the Latin American and Caribbean States and the Western European and other States corresponds to the number of seats to be filled in each region, may I take it that the General Assembly decides to elect those candidates as members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The following 29 States have thus been elected members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008: the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Colombia, the Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Fiji, Finland, Guinea, Hungary, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Mali, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, the Netherlands, the Niger, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Spain, Tunisia and Tuvalu.

I congratulate the States that have been elected members of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme.

May I take it that it is the wish if the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 113?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 114

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(g) Appointment of members of the Committee on Conferences

Note by the Secretary-General (A/62/107)

The Acting President: As indicated in document A/62/107, since the terms of office of Austria, China, Egypt, Jamaica, Kenya, Nepal and the United States of America will expire on 31 December 2007, it will be necessary for the President of the General Assembly to appoint, during the current session, seven members in order to fill the resulting vacancies. Those members will serve for a period of three years, beginning on 1 January 2008.

After consultations with the Chairmen of the groups of African States, Asian States and Western European and other States, the President has appointed Austria, China, Japan, Kenya, Tunisia and the United States of America as members of the Committee on Conferences for a period of three years, beginning on 1 January 2008.

May I take it that the Assembly takes note of those appointments?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Regarding the remaining vacant seat from among the Latin American and Caribbean States, the President will continue to hold consultations with that regional group.

We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of sub-item (g) of agenda item 114.

Agenda item 114 (*continued*)

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(a) Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/62/528)

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee recommends in paragraph 6 of its report that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008: Mr. Jorge Flores Callejas of Honduras; Mr. Imtiaz Hussain of Pakistan; Ms. Misako Kaji of Japan; Mr. Jerry Kramer of Canada; Mr. Peter Maddens of Belgium; Mr. Nagesh Singh of India.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons as members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

(b) Appointment of members of the Committee on Contributions

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/62/529)

The Acting President: In paragraph 4 of the report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as

members of the Committee on Contributions for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008: Mr. Joseph Acakpo-Satchivi of Benin; Mr. Abdelmalek Bouheddou of Algeria; Mr. Gordon Eckersley of Australia; Mr. Bernardo Greiver del Hoyo of Uruguay; Mr. Luis Mariano Hermosillo Sosa of Mexico; and Mr. Eduardo Manuel da Fonseca Fernandes Ramos of Portugal.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons as members of the Committee on Contributions for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

(c) Confirmation of the appointment of members of the Investments Committee

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/62/530)

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee recommends in paragraph 5 of its report that the General Assembly confirm the appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. Achim Kassow of Germany and the reappointment of Mr. William McDonough of the United States of America and Ms. Hélène Ploix of France as members of the Investments Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to confirm the appointments by the Secretary-General of Mr. Achim Kassow of Germany and the reappointment of Mr. William McDonough of the United States of America and Ms. Hélène Ploix of France as members of the Investments Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In paragraph 6 of the same report, the Fifth Committee also recommends that the General Assembly reappoint Mr. Ivan Pictet of Switzerland as an ad hoc member of the Investments Committee for a one-year term beginning on 1 January 2008.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to confirm the reappointment of Mr. Ivan Pictet of Switzerland as an ad hoc member of the Investments Committee for a one-year term beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

(d) Appointment of a member of the Board of Auditors

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/62/531)

The Acting President: In paragraph 4 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint the Auditor-General of the General Audit Office of China as a member of the Board of Auditors for a six-year term of office beginning on 1 July 2008.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint the Auditor-General of the General Audit Office of China as a member of the Board of Auditors for a six-year term of office beginning on 1 July 2008?

It was so decided.

(e) Appointment of members of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/62/532)

The Acting President: In paragraph 4 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint Mr. Agustin Gordillo of Argentina and reappoint Mr. Dayendra Sena Wijewardane of Sri Lanka as members of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint Mr. Agustin Gordillo of Argentina and to reappoint Mr. Dayendra Sena Wijewardane of Sri Lanka as members of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

(f) Appointment of members of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/62/533)

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee recommends, in paragraph 8 of its report, that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee for a three-year term of office beginning 1 January 2008: Mr. Vadim Dubinkin of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vijayendra Nath Kaul of India and Mr. Adrian Patrick Strachan of Jamaica.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons as members of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In paragraph 9 of the same report, the Fifth Committee also recommends, in accordance with paragraph 7 of the annex to resolution 61/275 of 29 June 2007, that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008: Mr. John Muwanga of Uganda and Mr. David M. Walker of the United States of America.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons as members of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2008?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-items (a) to (f) of agenda item 114?

It was so decided.

Programme of work and organization of the session

The Acting President: I would like to inform members that, in order to allow time for further consultations on draft resolution A/62/L.11, the consideration of agenda item 48, "Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields", and agenda item 116, "Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit", scheduled as the first item this morning, will be postponed to Monday, 19 November 2007.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey), Vice-President, in the Chair.

The Acting President: I would now like to consult members regarding an extension for the work of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee). Members will recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2007, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) would complete its work by Thursday, 15 November 2007.

However, the President has been informed by the Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee that the Committee will not be able to complete its work by today, Thursday, 15 November and would need an additional meeting on 20 November 2007, depending on the availability of conference services.

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly agrees to extend the work of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee for one additional meeting?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.

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General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

53rd plenary meeting
Monday, 19 November 2007, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Cyclone in Bangladesh

The President: Before proceeding to the items on our agenda, I should like, on behalf of all the members of the General Assembly, to extend our deepest sympathies to the Government and the people of Bangladesh for the tragic loss of life and material damage that have resulted from the recent cyclone.

May I also express the hope that the international community will show its solidarity and respond promptly and generously to any requests for their help.

Agenda items 48 and 116 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Draft resolution (A/62/L.11/Rev.1)

The President: I would like to call the Assembly's attention to draft resolution A/62/L.11/Rev.1, in particular that it has also been issued under agenda item 54, "Sustainable development".

Members will recall that, at the second plenary meeting on 21 September 2007, this item was allocated to the Second Committee for its consideration. If there is no objection, the General Assembly will take action on draft resolution A/62/L.11/Rev.1 also under agenda item 54.

It was so decided.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/62/L.11/Rev.1, entitled "Overview of United Nations activities relating to climate change".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/62/L.11/Rev.1?

Draft resolution A/62/L.11/Rev.1 was adopted (resolution 62/8).

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda items 48 and 116.

Agenda items 71 and 72

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/324 and Corr.1)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/62/72, A/62/83, A/62/87 and A/62/323)

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(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/310)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/82)

(d) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/467)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.12)

Assistance to survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, particularly orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/310)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine to introduce draft resolution A/62/L.12

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretariat for the report submitted under agenda item 71(d), entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance has been acquiring growing importance in the light of an increasing number of humanitarian threats and challenges. We proceed from the necessity to ensure comprehensive and coordinated responses to humanitarian situations. It is important to preserve the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance — namely, neutrality, humanity, impartiality, respect for sovereignty and the territorial integrity of States.

Ukraine attaches utmost importance to the role of the United Nations, particularly that of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in the strengthening of international cooperation in mitigating and minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. It is essential to ensure that the United Nations strategy for Chernobyl is implemented in an effective and timely manner. Ukraine strongly believes that, given the scope and magnitude of the Chernobyl catastrophe and its severe long-term consequences, this issue should remain on the agenda of the General Assembly and be considered in plenary in the future as part of the humanitarian cluster, with a special focus on economic assistance.

In a statement, delivered earlier this year, the President of Ukraine, Victor Yushchenko, stressed that the Chernobyl issue affected the whole country, and he insisted that the polluted zone should be developed, calling it

> "not only the area of tragedy but also the land of vast opportunities ... . This territory must not be forgotten. We want to see this land alive and revived".

The draft resolution before us today (A/62/L.12) is a platform for further action to optimize the international response to the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. This document, based on the Secretary-General's biennial report, takes stock of the progress made so far and seeks to map out further the plans for immediate assistance. It recognizes the importance of strengthening international cooperation on Chernobyl.

It is essential to emphasize that Member States welcome efforts of the international community to complete construction of the shelter facility and related nuclear safety projects at Chernobyl, in accordance with international standards, to transform the site into a stable and environmentally safe state.

We pay special attention to the proposal by the UNDP "to coordinate the drafting of a United Nations action plan for Chernobyl recovery to 2016" in order to implement the Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Regions, the aim of which is to maximize limited resources, avoid duplication of effort and build on recognized agency mandates and competencies.

While cordially thanking all delegations for their support in bringing this draft resolution to consensus, we kindly request that delegations consider sponsoring it as well.

We appreciate the contributions made by all Member States and organizations of the United Nations system, as well as representatives of civil society, the private sector and the donor community, towards the development of cooperation to mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Government of Ukraine remains fully committed to cooperating with the other two affected States, as well as with all international partners, to mitigate the legacy of the Chernobyl tragedy.

Since the Chernobyl disaster has affected many parts of the world, it is important that we continue to study its consequences in order to enable humankind to never forget the bitter lessons of the past.

Mr. Godinho (Portugal): First of all, I join in the expression of sympathy expressed by you, Mr. President, in respect of the recent tragic calamity in Bangladesh.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Serbia, as well as the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted for consideration under this agenda item. The EU would also like to express its solidarity with all those affected by humanitarian emergencies in the last year. We wish to pay tribute to the courageous humanitarian field workers who risk their lives to bring assistance to those in need.

Events this year, the most recent being the humanitarian and security crisis in the Sudan, and in the Darfur region in particular, as well as the crises in Chad and the Central African Republic, have again highlighted the importance of an immediate and coherent response by the humanitarian community as a whole, as well as the need for enhanced cooperation and collaboration with national and local governments.

The principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence remain the cornerstones for the provision of humanitarian assistance, as does the need to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. Through its future consensus on humanitarian aid, which we expect to be endorsed by the end of the year, the EU reaffirms that its humanitarian action should be needs-based and respect these humanitarian principles. We also reiterate our commitment to continued support for the central and overall coordinating role of the United Nations in promoting a coherent international response to humanitarian crises.

The issue of access is central to all humanitarian work. The lack of access and the obstruction of aid, including bureaucratic obstacles, continue to raise concern. We all have a collective responsibility to guarantee that people in need receive assistance. The European Union wishes to strongly urge all Governments and parties to conflict to ensure rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance and protection of affected populations. We also condemn attacks against humanitarian personnel and once again call for the need to hold accountable those responsible for perpetrating illegal acts. Bringing perpetrators to justice is vital, and stronger action must be taken to end impunity.

The European Union calls for an immediate end to violence against civilians, including sexual and gender-based violence. Effective measures for prevention, as well as for protection of and support to victims of gender-based violence, must be put in place by Member States. In addition, we strongly encourage the integration of a gender perspective into humanitarian operations.

Regarding refugees and displacement, the EU notes with great concern that the number of refugees around the world has increased this year to almost 10 million. Furthermore, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) continues to grow at an alarming rate, totalling almost 24 million worldwide at the moment. We believe that protection of and assistance to IDPs should be comprehensively strengthened. The EU, therefore, welcomes the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as a cluster — lead in this regard and looks forward to further cooperation with the United Nations on this issue.

The EU is committed to the advancement of a humanitarian reform agenda for the promotion of a more predictable and effective humanitarian response. The Union strongly supports the cluster approach and hopes to see further progress in the rollout of clusters, both at the global and field levels, particularly in ongoing emergencies. The cluster system can help bridge gaps in sectoral capacity, avoid duplication and improve response capacity through the pooling of efforts and resources. In this context, and while acknowledging that there is always room for

improvement, we are pleased with the initial feedback from the field and call for a joint effort to inform local, national and regional authorities about the operations and benefits of the cluster approach. We also call on States to respond to the final appeal for building global humanitarian response capacity launched in April of this year.

On a separate point, the humanitarian/resident coordinator system is key to a successfully coordinated humanitarian response at the country level. The European Union welcomes recent initiatives which seek to strengthen the humanitarian/resident coordinator system such as the establishment of a humanitarian coordinator pool, as well as better recruitment and training practices.

Recognizing the benefits of the effective engagement and coordination of relevant humanitarian actors, the European Union continues to support and further encourage the establishment of partnerships with local actors and non-governmental organizations, as well as with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. While fully taking into account the specificity of actors and their diversity, we consider that the interaction and close involvement of NGOs, for example, is very important. In effect, non-governmental and community-based organizations are in many cases the first to respond in crises and play a key role in humanitarian response.

The European Union believes that the roles and responsibilities of actors in the United Nations system working with the transition from relief to development should be strengthened, both in natural disaster situations and complex emergencies. In that context, we believe that the Peacebuilding Commission can make an important contribution to a coordinated response by the United Nations to States emerging from conflict, as we have seen in the cases of Burundi and Sierra Leone. The European Union remains committed to the work of the Commission and looks forward to further work in defining areas of the added-value it can provide.

On funding, the EU welcomes the upgraded Central Emergency Response Fund which has played an important role in enabling quicker and more effective responses to humanitarian emergencies. We are pleased to see that over 75 countries have contributed to the Fund. The European Union, for its part, remains committed to the stipulated target of $500 million by 2008. Regarding the United Nations Consolidated Appeal Process — further efforts must be made in order to provide more inclusive and better coordinated needs assessments.

Indicators of emerging crises and needs assessments should be prepared in cooperation with other humanitarian actors and should be reliable, accurate and timely. The European Union encourages further improved priority setting, including in the consolidated Appeal Process. United Nations humanitarian agencies should also develop common mechanisms for compiling and reporting more robust data on humanitarian needs, on assistance and on the performance of humanitarian organizations in meeting demonstrated needs through the use of standards and indicators. Without accurate data and properly assessed needs, humanitarian actors will be at risk of not being able to provide the most suitable and best equipped response to crises.

In recent years, natural disasters have caused more victims and devastation than man-made crises. Just as an example, this year has seen 13 flash appeals for natural disasters, which is three more than the last annual record. According to some statistics, the number of people threatened by natural disasters increased by three times over the last 30 years, and the number of people affected by natural disasters has doubled every 10 years. In that respect, we take note of the recent launch in Geneva of the Global Humanitarian Forum and the intention, in the initial phase of its work, to focus efforts on the humanitarian impact of climate change.

Events this year, especially in Africa, have once again brought to our attention the potential devastating effects of natural disasters and highlighted the importance of an urgent and coherent response by the humanitarian community as a whole. For these reasons and others, the European Union attaches great importance to developing and sustaining disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response capacity at all levels. Lessons learned have shown us that, in the aftermath of a disaster, more lives are saved when response teams can deploy immediately, particularly at the local and national levels.

To that end, the European Union urges States to implement the priorities set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action, as well as to incorporate disaster reduction efforts into sustainable development

and poverty reduction strategies. Early warning mechanisms must also be improved and expanded as a matter of priority. States must invest more in disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

As stated in the report of the Secretary-General, the impact of heavy flooding in Mozambique in 2007 was significantly less than in 2001 thanks partly to improved community preparedness, the introduction of an early warning system and improved national and international coordination, including through the use of military assets.

Allow me to take special note of the positive references made in the Secretary-General's report (A/62/310) to the progress achieved in Rwanda, taking into account the special needs of orphans, widows and victims of sexual abuse from the Rwandan genocide. We also wish to underline the importance of a well-supported solid transition from relief to development.

Finally, and on the issue of the Chernobyl disaster, the European Union is pleased to note that the Secretary-General's report (A/62/467) makes reference to the many efforts and improvements that have been achieved in the past couple of years. As such, we feel that the issue of Chernobyl and the relevant draft resolution (A/62/L.12) would be more appropriately pursued in the development sphere as opposed to the humanitarian cluster where it is currently placed.

The European Union fully accepts the need to make the international humanitarian response system more predictable and effective. We also encourage further efforts to adhere to the principles and best practices of good humanitarian donorship. The European Union will continue to play its part, not only in responding to emergencies as they occur but also in strengthening the international community's capacity to respond.

In that regard, we would like to thank the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their efforts. The past year has posed many challenges to the humanitarian community. We have a duty to continue our collective efforts to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response, always to the benefit of the people in need.

Mr. Tsalko (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of the Republic of Belarus, I have the honour of thanking the Secretary-General and the United Nations for the report prepared for our consideration, entitled "Optimizing the international effort to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster" (A/62/467). The information in the report fully reflects the activities of the international community on Chernobyl problems, as well as the coordinating role of the United Nations Development Programme.

The report enables us to evaluate the various elements of the actions taken and the activities undertaken through international cooperation on Chernobyl and the great number of events that have taken place in that sphere over the past two years. Most importantly, the report describes the development by Belarus of a new stage of cooperation on Chernobyl. The basic elements of that stage include not emergency humanitarian assistance but rather comprehensive rehabilitation of the polluted territory, including restoring socio-economic activity and meeting the need to establish safe living conditions for individuals and to develop of the regions affected.

The information in the report on the joint programmes carried out by the Republic of Belarus, agencies of the United Nations system, other international organizations and foreign countries very convincingly illustrates the timeliness and effectiveness of the transition to development.

Belarus welcomes the beginning of the implementation of the initiative to assess environmental and security problems in Eastern Europe, which includes an international cooperation project to study the environmental effects of radiation from the accident by taking advantage of the potentials of the Polesie State Radiology Preserve and to revive the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network.

The Republic of Belarus is very grateful for the holding, on 28 April 2006, of a special General Assembly meeting devoted to the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. That was a further illustration of the international community's resolve to mitigate the consequences of the catastrophe.

Belarus notes with satisfaction that there has been steady improvement in living conditions in the region affected by the catastrophe. Nevertheless, 20 per cent of the area contaminated by radioactivity is home to more than 1.3 million persons — among whom the incidence of illness is rising, especially thyroid

problems. The Chernobyl catastrophe has had an effect on all human activity, including in the areas of production, culture, science and the economy. Agriculture has been especially affected, with 2,640 square kilometers of cropland removed from production. There were 123 sites producing minerals and other raw materials in the contaminated area. More than 2 million cubic metres of timber production has been lost. The demographic situation in the Chernobyl region has been severely damaged. These and other problems add a heavy burden to our economy.

The environmental and economic rehabilitation of the most affected areas constitutes our Government's main concern. More than 1 million hectares of agricultural land require constant attention in order to ensure clean foodstuffs that meet norms. We are also working to improve specialized medical assistance for those affected by the disaster. Another priority in our socio-economic policy is gas supply. We must also work to supply the affected population with adequate drinking water and to restore contaminated settled areas, where we have to build schools, hospitals and preschools. We also have to improve the legislative basis for minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, so as to ensure targeted financial support by the Government and the establishment of favourable economic conditions for the development of the affected areas.

A planned and systematic approach must be developed to address those problems. We have therefore developed a national programme to overcome the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster to cover the period 2006-2010. In that regard, the national budget will include a line item of $1.6 billion. The national Government is now spending about $1 million daily to that effort.

The Republic of Belarus takes note of the fact that the provisions of draft resolution A/62/L.12 to strengthen international cooperation and the coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the effects of the Chernobyl disaster reflect the consistent, systematic and constructive approach of the international community to activities aimed at overcoming the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We welcome the appeal by the General Assembly to the Secretary-General and the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl for continued efforts to enhance the coordination of international efforts in this area.

Our country is especially pleased about the positive reaction and support of the international community for the proposal of Belarus to designate the third decade after Chernobyl as the decade of recovery and sustainable development of the affected regions and we welcome UNDP's initiative to coordinate work on drafting a plan for the decade. That initiative was proposed by Belarus to ensure planned cooperation on the problem of Chernobyl among the Governments of the three most affected countries, scientific groups, international organizations and foreign countries. Joint preparation and implementation of the plan for the decade will enable us to avoid duplication of effort and expenditure that is inevitable when so many participants are working to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

In addition to the decade initiative, the meeting held on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster also featured an appeal by the General Assembly for Belarus to join the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. Unfortunately, this matter has not been decided yet. Given the amount of experience and scientific information that Belarus has accumulated on the issue of atomic radiation as a result of Chernobyl, we believe that the participation of our experts in the Scientific Committee would be of great use to the entire international community.

The Republic of Belarus would like to take this opportunity today to thank all its international partners for their support for our country's activities in overcoming the effects of the Chernobyl disaster. We express the hope that our joint efforts will serve to minimize the negative consequences of the disaster on the lives and health of those in the most affected areas. It is also very important to prevent the possibility of similar accidents in the future and to ensure the environmental safety of the planet as a whole.

Mr. Sallam (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the pleasure of thanking the President and the other members of the Bureau for guiding our work. We are also grateful to the Secretary-General for the reports he has provided on the item under discussion on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency assistance of the United Nations.

Human and property losses caused by natural disasters and conflicts in recent years, in a number of developing and developed countries alike, and the

international response and solidarity that followed to help affected States has led us to believe, without a shadow of a doubt, in the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in order to cope with such catastrophes, mitigate their destructive effects and assist victims to return to normal lives as soon as possible. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia therefore reaffirms the central role of the United Nations in coordinating and strengthening emergency humanitarian and relief assistance in the long term. Saudi Arabia appreciates the efforts of the Organization and all those who work in the area of humanitarian assistance.

We would like to emphasize the need to implement the recommendations emanating from international conferences dealing with this issue. That should be done through a comprehensive approach that addresses all stages — beginning with early warning and including the provision of assistance, reconstruction and development. It should also include measures to help poorer States to strengthen their national capacities and cope with natural disasters and the repercussions of war.

Based on its concern to discharge its humanitarian responsibilities vis-à-vis victims of catastrophes and epidemics, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always contributed to United Nations funds and programmes entrusted with this mandate. Saudi Arabia has also made additional contributions as needs arose. Direct contributions have been given to the victims of disasters in coordination with many specialized international organizations. The Saudi Red Crescent Society had distributed in timely fashion over the past three years $361 million for assistance in providing humanitarian services. The Society has acquired distinct experience in this area, and we are very proud of it.

The humanitarian aid provided by Saudi Arabia has not only been limited to bilateral and direct channels and means but has been extended to regional and international efforts through competent funds and international development institutions. This aid has totalled about $24 billion. Saudi Arabia has also contributed to international efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including economic and financial assistance, through various Saudi Arabian funds and regional and international organizations in the context of bilateral agreements with developing countries. All of this is out of our firm conviction that this kind of emergency and development assistance, which is beneficial to all humanity, is indispensable to peaceful coexistence and constructive cooperation and solidarity. Saudi Arabia has therefore provided favourable development assistance in cash and kind, through bilateral channels, totalling over $83.7 billion, which is about four per cent of our gross national product. This is the highest percentage of aid in the entire world.

Eighty-seven developing countries from all continents have benefited from our assistance. This aid has strengthened long-term economic and social development, helped rebuild infrastructure and provided support for education, health, water, agriculture, well-drilling, dam-building and other key sectors. In terms of debt alleviation, Saudi Arabia has cancelled more than $6 billion worth of debt for the poorest developing countries.

Addressing with a serious and realistic attitude the sense of frustration and despair of citizens of the poorer countries because of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and indebtedness, requires us to deepen the principles of humanitarianism, equality, justice and sustainable development in their health, educational, economic and social dimensions. This is all to strengthen international peace, stability and security. This calls for a genuine partnership and mutual development pact between the North and the South.

In addition to their dire need for official development assistance, the indebtedness of the poorest and medium-income countries should also be addressed. Foreign direct investment and the transfer of technology to developing countries must be carried out in a serious fashion in order to liberate international trade and ensure international economic growth.

To guarantee the provision of oil, Saudi Arabia has increased its production capacity which, as everyone knows, is a very expensive endeavour. Saudi Arabia has also hosted a forum on energy in Riyadh — a context for negotiation and cooperation between producers and consumers in order to stabilize oil markets, since oil is an important strategic product that is crucial to international economic stability. Saudi Arabia, in this context, is participating, as a signatory of international instruments to protect the environment, in every international effort to protect the environment, positively, within the principles of common international action, including the Kyoto Protocol.

Saudi Arabia is working to ensure that the world takes the required measures to protect the environment, on the one hand, while protecting global economic growth on the other. We believe that the continuing to development of technology and energy is the key to coping with environmental problems, in particular climate change. The international community must take the necessary measures to confront this problem, in keeping with common, but differentiated responsibility, between developed and developing countries, as set out in the Convention on Climate Change.

Ms. Smith (Australia): The international community is faced today with a formidable level of disasters and emergencies, both in scale and number. These humanitarian emergencies wreak havoc on nations and communities, threatening economic growth and undermining development, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is our duty to seek to prevent and respond to humanitarian crises. It is also our responsibility to ensure accountability for the impact of our assistance. At the same time we are facing new challenges, such as climate change, that continue to add complexity to the planning and delivery of humanitarian action.

Australia strongly supports the key role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action, especially the role of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We welcome the Secretary-General's reports on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations and on the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), both of which are informing our discussions and negotiations at this General Assembly.

We have, on a number of occasions, commented positively on the humanitarian reform agenda and the steps the humanitarian system, under OCHA's leadership, have taken to improve the coordination, capacity, funding and partnerships that underpin effective humanitarian action. But we consider it is no longer correct to point to the cluster approach, strengthening of humanitarian coordinators, and mechanisms such as CERF as new approaches or reforms. These are all now integral and fundamental to humanitarian action and how the humanitarian community operates. Lessons are still to be learned and efforts to improve humanitarian response even further must continue. To that end, we look forward to the independent review of CERF and external review of the cluster approach.

All of us who are engaged in humanitarian action must strive to ensure that what we do is as effective as possible and is based on needs. This requires resources, people with the right skills in the right places at the right time, strong and effective coordination of effort, appropriate tools, proper accountability and risk management, and strong and clear leadership. Supporting this must be the objective of the General Assembly as well as the Economic and Social Council.

The best response system in the world is useless if affected communities cannot be reached. Fundamental to saving lives in any emergency is rapid, safe and unhindered access by humanitarian personnel and to goods and services to people in need. Without access, lives cannot be saved. This is simply irrefutable. The safety of humanitarian personnel in emergency response is also critical. Too many humanitarian workers' lives are lost in the line of duty each year. We pay tribute to those who have died while seeking to protect the lives of others. We urge more practical measures, such as encouraging recipient States to work closely with organizations delivering humanitarian aid, to facilitate access and to protect humanitarian personnel.

Another critical humanitarian issue that requires our urgent attention is the protection of civilians. Australia calls on all Member States and other actors, especially in armed conflicts, to prevent violence committed against civilian populations and to effectively respond if and when such acts occur. Australia is particularly concerned that gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, continues to occur at alarming levels in emergency situations. Such violence must be prevented and stopped wherever it occurs or has the potential to occur. Perpetrators of such violence must be apprehended and brought to account, and the survivors must be given the care and support that they need and deserve.

Our doctors tell us that prevention is always better and easier than cure. This fact is as true in the humanitarian field as it is in health care. Australia considers disaster risk reduction, which includes prevention, mitigation and preparedness for natural disasters, as an important priority for humanitarian and development assistance. In this regard, we commend the Hyogo Framework for Action and its programme of

work. Implementation of the Hyogo Framework helps build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters and advocates for the integration of disaster risk reduction into legislation and development planning. Building on Hyogo, we welcome the inaugural meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in June of this year. This forum provided support for the dissemination of disaster risk reduction best practices and the promotion of partnerships among States, non-governmental organizations and the private sector for developing and supporting strategies to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action. We encourage further work in this critical area.

Australia is a strong supporter of humanitarian action and the role of the United Nations therein. We are active in supporting prevention, risk reduction and emergency response, and will continue to work to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. As I said previously, the humanitarian challenges facing the international community are formidable. This reality makes our efforts to strengthen our ability to respond all the more critical. We look forward to working with the United Nations, especially OCHA, and all Member States, as we continue to do so.

Mr. Al-Ajran (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today we are discussing an important item on the agenda of the General Assembly, namely, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

During the last year, the United Nations, through its various specialized agencies, programmes and offices, has played an outstanding role in facilitating the transport and delivery of urgent humanitarian assistance. We share the deep concern expressed by the Secretary-General's report (A/62/87) regarding the increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters compared with previous years, where the damages caused by these disasters have led to a direct effect on the lives of 143 million people and economic losses surpassing $34 billion. We pay our condolences to the Government and the people of Bangladesh over the latest disaster, the hurricane that struck Bangladesh, caused thousands of deaths and resulted in millions of refugees.

My country wishes to convey its gratitude and appreciation to all those providing humanitarian assistance for all their sacrifices. It also expresses deep concern over their targeting and threats aimed at them in zones of natural disasters and conflict. We call upon all countries that host humanitarian workers to exert all necessary efforts to ensure the safety of these international staff, and also commend the proposal of the Secretary-General to set forth preventive plans, exchange information and conduct risk assessments, since such an approach will guarantee the safety of the United Nations staff in the field.

The State of Kuwait is at the forefront of nations providing relief assistance to those ravaged by natural disasters. This assistance is presented in a direct bilateral manner with the States or the regions devastated, out of its firm belief in the necessity of a quick response. During the last three years, Kuwait provided financial assistance as follows: $250,000 to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to assist it in confronting the effects of the flooding of September 2007; $500,000 to assist those affected by the typhoon Yamin, which hit the Sindh and Balochistan regions of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in July 2007; $2 million to assist Somalia in combating the effects of the flooding of July 2007; $500 million to assist in the relief of those affected by hurricane Katrina in the United States; $100 million to those affected by the earthquake in South Asia; $100 million to the States affected by the Asian tsunami disaster; and $300,000 to some Caribbean States affected by hurricane Wilma in November 2005.

The aid that Kuwait provides is full and complete; no amount is discounted for transport, handling and management. In this regard, I also wish to mention that my country has also contributed the amount of $200,000 to the Central Emergency Relief Fund. Since its establishment, the Fund has responded promptly to urgent appeals in emergency situations and, while we commend its performance, we call upon all States Member of the United Nations to increase their contributions to the Fund in order to achieve the desired declared goal of $500 million by 2008.

We affirm the importance of international cooperation in implementing the commitments made to the suffering Palestinian people; that is our responsibility. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the rapid intervention operations by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the temporary international mechanism, which have spent some $800 million on food, budgetary and monetary support in

emergencies. I would also like to highlight the fact that my country continues to extend assistance to the Palestinians, both directly through the Palestinian Authority or through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Our shared international cooperation cannot solve the problems of the Palestinian people, and the assistance is not the ultimate desire of the Palestinians, as long as Israel continues its inhumane practices against the Palestinian people in undermining all efforts made in that respect and refuses to transfer the Palestinian taxation levies it has collected, except for one transfer that took place in 2007. These practices have added to the worsening of the situation of the Palestinians.

We affirm the importance of cooperating with the Secretary-General's proposal to devise plans of disaster readiness at all levels, update existing plans, and enhance regular training for disasters of the magnitude of Category 5 hurricane Hugo, which struck in 2005. In this regard, we call upon Member States to strengthen their roles and make early warning systems among the priorities of their national, regional and international plans for disaster management.

Finally, I wish to indicate that the State of Kuwait will continue to provide bilateral assistance through the United Nations specialized agencies in order to confront disasters and help rebuild through the efforts of some national development institutes, such as the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and other Kuwaiti charitable organizations and associations. We look forward to a world where everyone lives in security, stability and prosperity.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): First, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports provided for this important session of the General Assembly. On behalf of the Government of Iceland, I would like to offer our sincerest condolences to the countries that have experienced humanitarian emergencies. At this very moment, our thoughts are with the people of Bangladesh. I express our deepest sympathy to and solidarity with the families of the victims and all those affected.

The international community learned important lessons in the aftermath of the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004. But we also learned that reform of the humanitarian response was urgently needed. We learned that available funds, impact evaluation, needs assessment and effective coordination of actions of the many important actors in humanitarian assistance are crucial elements for achieving the best results.

We welcome the improvements that have already been made in humanitarian response, in which the United Nations has a leadership role. We also emphasize the need to continue on that path.

We thank the Secretary-General and the Joint Inspection Unit for the recommendations made for reform, which provides a good basis for our work. I wish to underline that gender mainstreaming should be considered as a cross-cutting issue from the earliest stages of any reform.

Governments have an important role to play in ensuring availability of funds. We all know that extensive delays in getting humanitarian assistance to those in need can prove to be disastrous. For that reason, predictable, fast and sound funding in the wake of humanitarian disasters is of the essence.

The establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund has been very successful. It can provide a reliable source of financing that helps agencies on the ground to deal with problems quickly. It is likely that the need for funds will increase, and Governments have to intensify their efforts. We look forward to the pledging conference to be held in December.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant part in humanitarian and development work. The Government of Iceland has, therefore, decided to double its contributions in 2008 allocated to humanitarian and relief operations through Icelandic NGOs and the Red Cross. The private sector is also an important player in building up economic growth. We plan to explore further innovative ways of working with the private sector in developing countries. The Government seeks to harness the energies and efficiencies of NGOs and the private sector, strengthen the pioneering work that they are doing and raise public awareness of the situation in the poorest parts of the world.

I would like to turn briefly to the issue of assistance to the Palestinian people. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/62/82) on the issue, which provides a good overview of the situation and underlines the need for continued, and indeed increased, assistance. The report highlights the role of

women. We all know that there are strong links between women's empowerment and poverty reduction in general, as has been said so often. In cases of humanitarian crisis, women and children are not only the principal victims; women and girls are also particularly vulnerable to various forms of abuse. We therefore welcome the intensified emphasis in the report on protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups in crises.

In our debates within this institution we should be careful not to lose sight of the purpose of our work. What are the reasons behind the effort? As the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council responsible for the humanitarian affairs segment this year in Geneva, I have been fortunate to have an opportunity to work closely with very efficient experts on the issue, both representatives from Member States as well as from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other humanitarian actors. I was impressed to learn how they focus more on the why and less on the how — for example, which version of a text to use. They realize that we are here to help people in need and that we are here to save lives and help people to survive disasters, and that the means should not become the end. If we all continue to do our work in this positive spirit, we will make a difference.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Secretariat for the documents it has prepared for our discussions.

My delegation would like to reiterate here its support for a clear division of labour between the debates of the General Assembly and those of the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council.

Preserving the ambit for humanitarian action is a prerequisite for humanitarian assistance. However, today we are seeing a shrinking of that space. Local and international staff of neutral and impartial humanitarian organizations have paid a heavy toll in human life this year. Similarly, speedy, comprehensive and unimpeded access to people affected by disaster or conflict remains inadequate and unsatisfactory in many respects.

A humanitarian environment is not a given and has to be negotiated and secured through a joint effort on the part of all stakeholders involved, especially in complex emergency situations. International law — and above all the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols — as well as the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol, include essential norms regulating the arena for humanitarian action. Unfortunately, those obligations are too often ignored.

Switzerland encourages the Emergency Relief Coordinator to support efforts to preserve the space for humanitarian action by actively facilitating access to affected areas for operational organizations. We strongly urge all States and parties to armed conflicts to honour their obligations, authorize speedy and unimpeded passage of all relief consignments, equipment and personnel, protect civilian populations and ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel. We also underscore the unique nature of United Nations humanitarian assistance, which should continue to be independent, neutral and impartial.

The reform of the United Nations humanitarian system, which began two years ago, has produced some encouraging results. However, efforts to sustainably bolster the capacity and effectiveness of the United Nations system on the ground in all types of emergency and under whatever administrative structure — whether that of a resident or humanitarian coordinator or, in the case of integrated missions, a special representative of the Secretary-General — must be redoubled. We also want this process put in a wider context. The strengthening of the coordination of United Nations emergency aid is a subject that precedes this reform, and that will remain at the centre of our concerns in the future.

The international humanitarian system is comprised of several components that are both independent of and complementary to United Nations agencies — such as local and international non-governmental organizations and the members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In that regard, we are pleased that the organizers of the thirtieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which will be held in Geneva from 26 to 30 November, have chosen "Together for humanity" as the theme for that important meeting.

Although the reforms of the United Nations humanitarian system initiated two years ago provide clear guidance for improving operational aspects of humanitarian coordination, there is much less clarity as regards the normative evolution of humanitarian policies and principles since the adoption of resolution

46/182. An analytical evaluation of the normative framework for humanitarian coordination may help us to identify priority areas to focus on, including as regards future resolutions of the General Assembly. Such prioritization will make it possible to improve the relevance and impact of resolutions addressing humanitarian issues.

In a world of ever-changing vulnerabilities and risks, the strengthening of national disaster-preparedness capacities deserves particular attention. In keeping with the commitments set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, all participants in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction — including Governments, regional organizations, the Secretariat and the agencies of the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector — must act swiftly and together to help to attain the objective of reducing for the long term the losses caused by disasters.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to thank the Secretary-General in particular for the report submitted in document A/62/87, which will be very useful in our discussions.

At the outset, I wish to indicate that Peru firmly supports United Nations efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Such efforts should be based on, inter alia, the following pillars: observance of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality in providing humanitarian assistance; adherence to international law in the work of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel; and protection when any act or failure to act hinders or prevents the performance of their humanitarian functions.

In that connection, I should like to highlight a number of strategic guidelines that my delegation considers fundamental. First, we must take a comprehensive and systematic approach. Secondly, we must promote a culture of timely and unrestricted early warning. Thirdly, we must improve rapid-response capacities, recognizing the key advantages of local actors, who are closest to disasters. Fourthly, we need preventive measures, including public education activities, as well as preparation, mitigation and recovery efforts and programmes aimed at, inter alia, rehabilitation, reconstruction, restoring authority and the rule of law, developing sustainable ways to make a living and establishing conditions that promote development. Fifthly, we must promote North-South and South-South cooperation, participation by experts and the transfer of practical technology and knowledge. Sixthly, we must define the respective roles of States, the Organization and its relevant organs, other international organizations — including the international financial institutions — regional organizations, local Governments, communities, the military, experts, non-governmental organizations, the business community and the media, among other civil society actors. We must also improve their capacities.

We agree with the report's diagnosis of the current world situation. Indeed, the increasingly devastating effects of disasters are due to a real increase in the number of natural events and to the increased exposure and vulnerability of populations to the destructive effects of disasters. Climate change, swift and unplanned urbanization and greater population density, inter alia, are contributing to that trend. In that connection, if we are to break the new vicious circle of constant human and material losses, environmental and social degradation and increasing vulnerability, we believe it essential, as indicated in the report, that the international community work towards a disaster management approach that addresses the interconnectedness of threats and vulnerabilities.

In part III of the report, on enhancing the effectiveness of needs-based humanitarian assistance, it is indicated in section D, on broadening humanitarian partnerships, that private companies have continued to emerge as important relief partners. Our country, Peru, can attest to that. As a result of the earthquake that occurred on 15 August of this year, we witnessed the broad and generous mobilization of the entire population, but particularly of private companies, which played a key role in providing materials, food and assistance in the first moments of the emergency. In that regard, we agree with the report, which points out that as the private sector becomes an increasingly important partner, efforts must be made to adapt the United Nations regulatory environment to facilitate public-private partnerships.

Finally, we wish to express our agreement with each of the points set out in the conclusions contained in the Secretary-General's report, particularly regarding the need to organize regional responses to disasters. Accordingly, we should like to highlight the project Support for Disaster Prevention in the Andean

Community, which is the outcome of a financial agreement signed in 2003 by the European Union and the General Secretariat of the Andean Community. Its overall objective is to help reduce the vulnerability of persons and property exposed to the dangers and risks of natural disasters and to promote sustainable development in the countries of the Andean Community. It is included in the regional disaster prevention and management policies reflected in the Andean disaster prevention and management strategy and the corresponding strategic plan for 2005-2010.

In conclusion, I wish to express once again the gratitude of the Government of Peru to the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme in Lima and, through him, to all relevant agencies of the United Nations system for the invaluable assistance provided in so many ways when the earthquake struck the southern part of my country on 15 August.

Mrs. Thakur (India): I come from the land of Gautam Buddha, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, all of whom stood for the essential oneness of all human beings, which is the ethical basis for the United Nations and its humanitarian assistance. I am therefore pleased to participate in this debate today.

We thank the Secretary-General for the reports that have been prepared for the discussions on this agenda item. We note the factual nature of the reports, which identify some areas for improvement. We request the Secretary-General to enhance the analytical content of future reports.

All countries are vulnerable to disasters. Nations can, and indeed must, cooperate to find collective and cooperative solutions to the challenges that disasters represent. It is therefore heartening that, in recent years, Member States have come together to promote a more responsive, prompt, fair and needs-based humanitarian assistance system.

India welcomes the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as a non-political collaborative instrument that supports developing countries in times of need. India demonstrated its support for CERF by pledging a contribution of $2 million to the Fund at its launch in New York last year; those funds have already been disbursed. Our contribution was a sign of solidarity with international efforts aimed at addressing the needs of developing countries for emergency humanitarian assistance. It reflected our conviction that, through this reform measure, the United Nations would be better able to assist developing countries in the aftermath of a disaster by making resources available in a timely and predictable manner, and by allocating them evenly across emergencies. It is through the Fund's performance and even-handed approach to requests for assistance that it will continue to attract the support of Member States and donors. It is therefore extremely important that CERF retain a high degree of performance and credibility.

The report of the Secretary-General on CERF (A/62/72) states that the Fund has promoted early action and response to reduce loss of life, and that progress has been made towards achieving its objectives. The report provides details of the expenditures from CERF. It would also be useful to know, in tabular form, the details of all requests received for funding, the proportion of funding provided in each case and the criteria used for the allocations. We look forward to such detailed and analytical information in the forthcoming independent review that will examine the functioning of CERF over its first two years.

In handling disasters, it is important to have coherent national strategies and national capabilities to handle both disaster prevention and disaster management. The development of necessary national capabilities must be the starting point of a disaster management strategy. India has a forward-looking approach to disaster management and mitigation. We have constituted a National Disaster Management Authority, chaired by the Prime Minister and state-level disaster management authorities. The Authority has come forward with a new approach to disaster management that is based on moving away from a relief-centric, post-event approach in favour of a holistic, integrated preventive approach. The focus will be on disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation. Improved coordination among various agencies of the Government is a first step in the new approach. Greater awareness within civil society about prevention, mitigation and preparedness is the next important step, bearing in mind that lack of information and uncoordinated responses hamper relief efforts.

While there is no substitute for effective national efforts, a national response alone can sometimes be inadequate. There is a need for more bilateral, regional and international cooperation to deal with disasters and to make effective use of our capabilities. Greater

cooperation in relief and rehabilitation, in disaster preparedness and in setting up and maintaining early warning systems should be a part of the overall effort to deal with disasters. Through CERF, we have established a more reliable mechanism for saving lives after a disaster and addressing the needs of underfunded emergencies. However, greater efforts are required for disaster prevention, risk reduction and early warning so as to reduce the number of lives lost to disasters.

Disaster risk reduction should be based on proactive and pre-emptive action. Small investments in improving the safety of houses, for example, can reduce the risk of damage to life and property arising from earthquakes. Valuable lives and property can be saved through the use of appropriate housing technologies in earthquake-prone areas. India is developing affordable technologies of this kind. The international community should address the need for information-sharing in such technologies that would help prevent disasters. This approach would be a useful way of addressing the challenge of risk reduction.

Another intervention relates to low-cost insurance against risk. The penetration of insurance in most developing countries is still very limited. There is a need for a proactive approach in insuring the risk-prone regions through an approach that can spread the costs and ensure the financial sustainability of risk insurance mechanisms.

There is also a far greater need for focus on recovery and development after a disaster. A strong recovery effort that builds back better and pays due attention to disaster prevention builds resilience to future disasters. India contributes to the efforts of the Group of 77 to highlight this issue by coordinating an annual draft resolution on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development. We hope that greater attention will be paid to post-disaster recovery, which strains the capacities of most developing countries in the post-relief period.

We take note of the report's assessment regarding improving the delivery of United Nations humanitarian assistance, including through the improvement of United Nations coordination activities at the field level. The report highlights the cluster leadership approach as an effort in this direction. We believe that there is a need for an evaluation of this approach to assess its impact on improving delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly its timeliness, the additional expenditure that it entails and the perspective of the receiving countries where this approach has been implemented so far. This approach should be implemented at the country level with the consent and under the leadership of the national Government of the affected State.

India believes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as contained in the guiding principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance contained in the annex to resolution 46/182. We recall that the guiding principles require that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States be fully respected and that humanitarian assistance be provided with the consent of the affected country and, in principle, on the basis of an appeal by the affected country.

All humanitarian personnel, including those under the auspices of the United Nations, must observe the national laws of the countries where they are and must remain sensitive to the customs and traditions of the host State. They must function in a transparent manner and carry out their assistance-related activities through close consultation and coordination with the affected Government. That is essential for the credibility of international humanitarian assistance.

In accordance with Indian culture and philosophy, we respect all nations and religions. We believe that the world is one family. So, before I conclude, please allow me to wish everyone — all of my family members sitting here — the very best for the coming festival season from me and from my country, India.

Mr. Savostianov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Russia attaches great importance to the development of the humanitarian discourse in the United Nations. We call for its further strengthening and enhancement, and for the preservation of the non-politicized nature of the endeavour. We support efforts aimed at establishing an optimal division of labour and effective working relationships among the intergovernmental United Nations bodies involved in this process.

We believe that the General Assembly should focus on defining the parameters of the strategic coordination of United Nations humanitarian activities, the Economic and Social Council on developing the

practical aspects of General Assembly decisions and the Secretariat on implementing the requests of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator should continue to react promptly to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council requests, paying particular attention to providing these bodies with objective information on the humanitarian situation around the world.

In this connection, we take note that, in his recent report on strengthening of the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance (A/62/87), the Secretary-General rightly emphasized the importance of intensified international cooperation in the field of national preparedness for natural disasters, with a view to improving response and recovery capacities in the context of achieving the agreed goals of the Hyogo Framework for Action in the field of disaster risk reduction.

There is today a growing demand for disaster preparedness and early warning mechanisms. We therefore support measures aimed at strengthening contingency planning and preparing for disasters. We believe it necessary to strengthen national early warning, damage assessment and mitigation systems, and to develop international cooperation to build up national capacities in these areas. We support international efforts to promote a global early warning system for natural hazards of all types.

In our view, a promising area for cooperation is in the formulation of measures for adaptation to climate change. We are carefully studying proposals in this area, and we reaffirm our readiness to participate actively in the formulation of agreed approaches in this field.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is making great efforts to improve humanitarian response to natural disasters, technological catastrophes and complex humanitarian emergencies. On the whole, we welcome its work. Not everything here, however, is clear and transparent. For example, in the case of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in close cooperation with the United Nations and in partnership with the United Nations, including in the area of security, and at the same time claiming to be independent, it is not clear to whom they are responsible and accountable. Independence should not mean lack of accountability.

We believe that the United Nations-NGO partnership agreements can and should provide for mechanisms of NGO accountability to the United Nations. This is fully consistent with the task of ensuring coherence and coordination in the work of all organizations involved in humanitarian assistance with the leading role played by the United Nations. In the absence of accountability, it is difficult to ensure responsibility; that could lead to a situation in which a humanitarian mandate authorized by a recipient Government, on the basis of which a given NGO operates in the country, becomes a formal cover-up for activities inconsistent with that mandate. Moreover, this would undermine the concept of humanitarianism as the willingness of the strong to help the weak.

We look forward to the Secretariat's assessment of the implementation of the so-called cluster approach in pilot countries, with an emphasis on the United Nations family's interaction with non-governmental humanitarian organizations in the field.

The establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund has proven to be among the most significant results of our common efforts to improve the humanitarian response machinery. We welcome the Fund's activities during the first 18 months of its existence in its improved format. We anticipate that the independent review of the Fund's activities will be issued next year. In that review, particular attention should be paid to the criteria for allocation of the Fund's resources. I would also like to underline that it would be useful for the review to reflect the principles of interaction between the Fund and other United Nations financial mechanisms, in particular the Peacebuilding Fund, through which money is being channelled to the recipient countries. From our point of view, it is essential to avoid duplication of efforts and to maintain transparency in the criteria for the allocation of funds.

The importance of the compromise reflected in the fundamental resolution 46/182 cannot be overestimated. The guiding principles for the provision of United Nations humanitarian assistance that are enshrined in it are essential for any activities in this field, so as to maintain their credibility for all countries.

Today, the representative of Ukraine introduced for action by the General Assembly a draft resolution (A/62/L.12) on the strengthening of international

cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. More than 20 years after the tragedy this problem remains relevant, as its consequences continue to seriously affect the health of people and the environment, and to hamper the sustained socio-economic development of the affected territories of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

The Russian Government's policy on Chernobyl is focused on continuous assessment of the radiation impact on current programmes for comprehensive rehabilitation of these territories, to which Russia has allocated more than $10 billion over the years. The adoption of the draft resolution by consensus will demonstrate the international community's solidarity with the work of the affected countries and its willingness to continue devoting the necessary international attention to the Chernobyl problem.

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Traditionally, we acknowledge the special catalytic and coordinating role of the United Nations on this issue, in particular that of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). We are grateful to the UNDP leadership for the high level of cooperation that has been achieved in the implementation of our common objectives, with a view to improving the lives of people in the affected territories.

Mr. Amil (Pakistan): It is my privilege to participate in this important joint debate on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. We thank the Secretary-General for his various reports under this agenda item.

Given the multidimensional aspects, I would like to focus on issues of disaster preparedness and risk reduction in the context of challenges posed by natural disasters.

It is said that those who prepare in advance suffer less in emergencies. The scale of damage in emergencies is inversely proportional to the preventive measures taken to deal with them. It takes time to build, but seconds to destroy. It should therefore be our joint commitment to strengthen capacity at all levels to reduce the impact of disasters.

As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/323), the number and scale of natural disasters, particularly in the developing countries over the past decade, are on an alarming increase. While we cannot control the overpowering strength of natural disasters, we can reduce their impact and the devastation they cause. For that, we need to have in place an efficient emergency response system capable of handling large-scale disasters and mitigating their negative impact. I would also like to draw attention to humanitarian issues that used to be discussed during every General Assembly session.

Vulnerabilities are accentuated in most developing countries. The poverty-disaster interface has the potential for immense suffering and loss. In the long term, disasters have an adverse impact on the economic and social development of the vulnerable, especially the poor. Natural disasters severely impede progress towards development goals including the Millennium Development Goals. The 1994 Yokohama Strategy, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, provide frameworks for swift, systematic and well-coordinated responses to disasters by building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. If effectively implemented, those internationally agreed frameworks could substantially reduce loss of life and the impact on the social, economic and environmental assets of communities.

Pakistan welcomes the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). We remain committed to the work of the United Nations, and, accordingly, we will continue to contribute to the CERF.

I would also like to share our national experience in responding to a natural disaster of monumental proportion. The earthquake that struck Pakistan on 8 October 2005 wiped out in a matter of seconds what had taken many generations to build. That was a wake-up call for all of us. The world witnessed, minute by minute, the devastation caused by the earthquake. The loss of lives, bread-earners, livelihoods and infrastructure was unprecedented for us. The entire Pakistani nation came together to alleviate the suffering of the victims. The magnitude of the disaster was such that without international support we would have seen more pain and suffering. We acknowledge the outpouring of sympathy and assistance provided to the earthquake victims. The United Nations system played an important role in the coordination and mobilizing of resources.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Pakistan, I would like to thank each and every one who helped us in the aftermath of the earthquake.

I would now like to focus on some aspects that reinforced our belief in disaster preparedness. We were confronted with a situation where we had to go beyond the conventional disaster management model of response, relief and recovery to a more holistic model. That model included the processes of hazard identification and mitigation, community preparedness, integrated response efforts and recovery that had to be undertaken contiguously within a risk-management context to address issues of vulnerability.

First, we promulgated the National Disaster Management Ordinance in December 2006 and subsequently established the National Disaster Management Commission and Authority. The Prime Minister of Pakistan heads the National Disaster Management Commission, and its members include senior representatives from all provinces, leaders of the opposition in the upper and lower houses of the Parliament and representatives of the armed forces, civil society and non-governmental organizations.

Secondly, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework was approved by our Disaster Management Commission in March this year. We are working towards the implementation of priorities identified in the National Disaster Risk Management Framework. That requires aligning federal and provincial coordination structures, capabilities and resources into a unified, all-discipline and all-hazards approach to domestic disaster management. For the first time, a complete spectrum of disaster risk management activities is brought together to include prevention of, preparedness for and response to disasters. The system will cover all sectors as well as all administrative levels of the Government.

From our experience in the post-earthquake phase, we have learned the following lessons.

First, the integration of disaster risk reduction into all sectoral and national development policies and practices is necessary for achieving sustainable social, economic and environmental development. Secondly, it is important to develop and strengthen institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, in particular at the community level, that can systematically contribute to building resilience against natural disasters. In most disasters, provincial, district and local resources normally provide the first line of emergency response and management support.

Thirdly, the communities play the role of first responders in any disaster management and disaster risk reduction. Community-based approaches offer viable solutions for managing and reducing risks and ensuring sustainable development. Fourthly, it is important to build on people's local knowledge, coping mechanisms and cultural practices. We are convinced that top-down disaster reduction interventions alone are not sufficient. Fifthly, there is a need for the systematic incorporation of risk reduction approaches into the design and implementation of emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes in the reconstruction of the affected areas.

Pakistan welcomes all efforts to strengthen the work of humanitarian agencies and the United Nations in meeting the challenges of natural disasters. In this regard, we consider that the draft "Declaration relating to basic tenets of humanitarian action in emergency situations", contained in document A/60/627 of 5 January 2006, is an important contribution to support progress in the world's preparedness to meet emergency situations.

The Acting President: I now call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Before I deliver my written statement, I just want to convey on behalf of the Palestinian people and our leadership our deepest condolences and to express solidarity with the people and Government of Bangladesh following the tragedy that has befallen them. We are sure that the Government and people of Bangladesh will be able to survive this tragedy and to move on with their own plans and agenda.

I stand before you today to address a most vital basis for continued Palestinian steadfastness towards their future independence and statehood: international assistance. For decades, international aid has helped ease the suffering and hardships endured by an entire people, more than half of whom have lived as refugees for nearly 60 years now and the remainder of whom have been living for more than 40 years under the subjugation of an oppressive foreign military occupation. The assistance that has been provided over the years in the various fields, both through the United Nations and as direct assistance to the Palestinian people, has helped to alleviate the hardship of scores of

Palestinians and Palestinian families. For countless others, it has been the only source of survival and sustenance throughout endless periods of instability, crisis and uncertainty.

While the Palestinian people and its leadership are deeply grateful for that invaluable assistance, we believe it is imperative to ask ourselves the following questions as we convene to discuss this issue today. How much have we helped that assistance to reach its full potential, and how much sabotage has the international community endured to its sustained assistance efforts? How many more internationally funded projects and efforts are we willing to allow the occupying Power to undermine and decimate as it continues pursuing its illegal policies and practices and continues deepening the humanitarian crisis, inevitably forcing that assistance to go off track, from development and State-building to relief and crisis management? How much longer is the international community willing to pay for the illegal acts of the occupying Power by relieving the consequences of those acts instead of bringing them to an end?

Numbers do not lie, and the latest figures regarding the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are astounding and tragic. In fact, all recent reports have documented the enormous burden international agencies are enduring in trying to address the continuously emerging needs of the Palestinian civilian population and to alleviate the crisis. At the same time, all infrastructure projects, industries and employment-generation projects have come to a grinding halt because of the repressive and unlawful measures imposed by the occupying Power, which have turned the Palestinian people from a people seeking development towards the birth of their future State to a population sinking into abject poverty and struggling to put food on the table and barely survive.

The latest report by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, sums up the bleak situation as follows:

> "The Israeli closure system remains a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, and restricts Palestinian access to health and education services, employment, markets and social and religious networks." (*A/62/75, summary*)

The closures, movement restrictions and the wall, among other unlawful Israeli measures, have battered the economy, destroyed thousands of livelihoods and made thousands of families destitute. In that regard, according to the International Labour Organization, 7 out of 10 Palestinian households, comprising 2.4 million people, are living in poverty in the occupied Palestinian territory. A report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) also addresses the extent of economic devastation caused by Israel's measures to the Palestinian economy, concluding that the Palestinian economy has been reduced to a size smaller than it was a decade ago due to Israeli restrictions on movement of Palestinian persons and goods. At the same time, the trade deficit has reached unprecedented proportions of 73 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), 30 per cent higher than its 30-year average. The World Bank monitoring report of September 2007 also noted that, in 2006 alone, Palestinian GDP contracted by nearly 8.8 per cent, and by a further 4.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2007.

The picture is of course most bleak in the Gaza Strip, where Israel's crippling siege has managed to bring the entire territory to the verge of collapse — socially, economically, medically and in all other aspects of life. This most brutal form of collective punishment by the occupying Power of the Palestinian civilian population, which undoubtedly amounts to a war crime, has thus far been unaffected and unshaken by international expressions of concern and calls for cessation. Instead, Israel continues to tighten the noose around Gaza and its population, choking life, hope and the prospects of a dignified future out of that part of the Palestinian territory, using illegal pretexts to cover up its abhorrent crimes. In reference to Israel's closures and siege of Gaza, Mr. John Dugard, the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, has stated that "it is a controlled strangulation that seriously violates norms of human rights law and humanitarian law". Indeed, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as countless other relevant instruments and provisions of international law, are being gravely violated by the occupying Power.

For months now, Israel has closed down all six of Gaza's crossings, significantly restricting and reducing the amount and quality of goods allowed into Gaza and ending the prospect of export from Gaza at the same time. The effects have been devastating. Gaza's export agriculture sector is facing the most serious threat to its existence as we speak because of that policy. Additionally, tens of millions of dollars in internationally funded projects, including construction projects — such as projects worth $160 million in necessary construction funded by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNDP and other agencies — have been suspended. Additionally, a shocking 90 per cent of Gaza's industries have shut down their operations, adding tens of thousands more Palestinians to the list of unemployed and needy. The siege has raised prices, sent living standards plummeting and forced international aid organizations and donors to divert their attention to providing Palestinians in Gaza with their most basic needs, namely, food and medicine.

The World Bank has noted that the "pace of capital flight has reached an all-time high in the last two years, with almost no foreign direct investment" because of Israel's punishing policy of closure and siege on the occupied Palestinian territory.

UNCTAD also notes a downward economic spiral in the West Bank and Gaza, warning that this has reinforced the momentum of de-development. Meanwhile, the report of the Secretary-General on this matter, which is contained in document A/62/82, while seriously lacking in terms of political context, does not address this situation in the context of the occupation that exists. Nevertheless, the report states in paragraph 73 that

> "The effects of these closures could not be reversed with increased humanitarian assistance. Development initiatives to improve the Palestinian economy were expected to have limited impact in an environment where intense access restrictions prevailed."

Therefore, despite a marked increase in aid levels, socioeconomic indicators have continued to show significant decline. UNCTAD's report concludes that the Palestinian economy has lost $8.4 billion in potential income in five years, which is twice the size of the Palestinian economy today. That should alarm us all; for such potential income, combined with the losses incurred by destroyed or sabotaged internationally funded projects and efforts, shows the grave trap that Palestinian development efforts and international assistance have actually fallen into.

The alarming situation I have just described is not the whole picture. For over a year now, Israel, the occupying Power, has not only tightened its punishing siege but continues to illegally withhold hundreds of millions of dollars in Palestinian tax revenues, further curtailing the Palestinian Authority's ability to function normally and serve the Palestinian public. Despite the disbursement of some of the withheld Palestinian tax revenues, Israel continues to withhold a significant amount, cynically using it as a political bargaining chip.

Furthermore, the punishing sanctions imposed by the international community on the Palestinian Authority, combined with earlier disruptions in assistance, have made a bad economic situation almost catastrophic. The suspension of direct international aid to the Palestinian Authority in early 2006 — which resulted in limiting assistance to basically humanitarian needs — and the bypassing of the existing mechanisms for coordinating aid with the Palestinian Authority have had lasting negative consequences. As a result, although international aid through temporary mechanisms has increased, that cannot alleviate the long-term ramifications of Israel's siege and closure. Moreover, it is necessary to recall here the assessment by the World Bank that the Palestinian Authority achievements in transparency and accountability have been undermined by donor mechanisms to sidestep the Palestinian Authority.

Perhaps the devastating results and implications of these sanctions were most aptly described by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. John Dugard, who said in his report,

> "In effect, the Palestinian people have been subjected to economic sanctions — the first time an occupied people have been so treated. This is difficult to understand. Israel is in violation of major Security Council and General Assembly resolutions dealing with unlawful territorial change and the violation of human rights and has failed to implement the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, yet it escapes the imposition of sanctions. Instead, the Palestinian people, rather than the Palestinian Authority, have

> been subjected to possibly the most rigorous form of international sanctions imposed in modern times". (*A/HRC/4/17, para. 54*)

Moreover, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, in a speech on 22 May 2007, also said that

> "There is a staggering irony in the contrast between the universal commitment to poverty eradication and the decision to impose on Palestinians one of the most severe sanctions regimes in recent history, thereby virtually guaranteeing the widespread incidence of extreme poverty".

The Secretary-General's report highlights that the rapid interventions by the United Nations system, temporary international mechanism and non-governmental organizations, which together disbursed upwards of $800 million in emergency food, cash and budget support, alleviated what could have been a much worse situation. However, recent reports by UNRWA, the World Food Programme (WFP) and other agencies also note that despite this increase, incomes have dropped while extreme poverty and food insecurity have substantially increased.

In fact, approximately two thirds of the children in Gaza now suffer from anaemia, that is, iron deficiency. Let me repeat that: approximately two thirds of children in Gaza today suffer from anaemia as a result of this situation, and, 51 per cent of the population in Gaza is food insecure. UNRWA and WFP are providing food assistance to 1.1 million people in Gaza, out of a population of 1.4 million. Mr. John Jing, UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, has described one of the consequences of this bleak reality by saying that the 200,000 schoolchildren attending UNRWA-run schools come to school "hungry and unable to concentrate".

International sanctions may now have been partially lifted, but the long-term economic damage arising out of the situation I have just described remains. Hence, our responsibilities are tremendous and the challenges that lie ahead are almost overwhelming. But failure is not an option, and we continue to rely on international action to support us in addressing this critical issue, somehow reversing the downward economic trend and meeting the continuing needs of the Palestinian people in the meantime.

We wish to recall that in the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) held in London in 2005, donors established new aid coordination bodies. However, the effectiveness of those structures was undermined by the aid boycott. Going forward, those aid coordination bodies must be revitalized, especially with the presence of the new Quartet representative, Mr. Tony Blair, and his leveraging of those structures, which could strengthen them considerably. We welcome the results of the AHLC meeting held in New York on 24 September 2007 and chaired by Norway, which confirmed the commitment of the international community to support the Palestinian Authority in building strong and viable institutions. We look forward to the meeting to be held in this regard in December in Paris.

As the Palestinian Authority continues to find itself facing a large deficit, significant debt and failing revenues, which hinder its ability to plan for the fiscal year ahead or to take charge of its planned economic and other reform plans as a result of the situation I just described, we attach high hopes and expectations for the upcoming donor conference in Paris. In this regard, we look forward to seeing a tangible translation of the AHLC's confirmation of the Palestinian Authority's Reform and Development Plan 2008-2010, which must be regarded as a key test of true international support of and commitment to Palestinian-driven institution-building, recovery and growth. We hope that the December conference will change the fragmented nature of aid flowing into the West Bank and Gaza so far — aid which has largely remained based on short-term political positions rather than a collective, long-term view based on broader economic fundamentals, which is what the Palestinian economic recovery needs most.

The international community should not allow Israel to continue to defy its obligations as an occupying Power through the illegal policies and practices that have led to the state of economic regression Palestine now faces. It is incumbent upon the international community to ensure that the occupying Power does not continue attacking internationally funded projects and aid workers with impunity, as these repeated attacks have clearly derailed the development process and frustrated assistance efforts.

Indeed, the international community must exercise its moral and legal authority by compelling the occupying Power to cease its violations and end its choking siege of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which plunges Palestine into hopelessness and deprivation. The cause of the utter destitution Palestinians now suffer is known to all parties concerned — it is the continued Israeli military occupation. Thus, and as numerous international organizations agree, full economic recovery and rehabilitation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which are the goals driving international assistance, will only be possible when this occupation ends.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates and its Government, I would like to extend sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Bangladesh over the severe loss of life and property caused by the cyclone that struck that country recently. We hope that international assistance will be extended to Bangladesh to lessen the impact of this natural disaster and to help the affected people there as a matter of urgency. My country will assume its role in that effort.

The reports of the Secretary-General on the items before us forecast an increasing demand for humanitarian activities from the United Nations and its partners, the relevant non-governmental organizations in the humanitarian field, in coming years. This is due to the increase in the number and severity of natural disasters, especially in developing countries, as a result of climate change, population growth and environmental degradation. Their disastrous impact is compounded by poverty, armed conflict, the spread of serious diseases and the growing number of displaced persons in many parts of the world. The result will be additional assistance responsibilities for the United Nations and its relevant entities, and a need for more human and financial resources.

We commend the United Nations for its humanitarian activities and its essential role in mobilizing and coordinating international efforts to provide humanitarian and relief emergency assistance to millions in affected areas, and in easing the impact of disasters caused by natural phenomena, wars and armed conflicts, and we urge all Member States to strengthen their cooperation with the Organization, especially by fulfilling their financial commitments to the agencies and to other entities responsible for humanitarian assistance.

We also urge Member States to build partnerships with the United Nations to strengthen the necessary humanitarian arrangements at the national, regional and international levels. In this context, we reiterate the importance of implementing the recommendations of international conferences with respect to formulating national and international strategies to deal with disasters in all their stages, including early warning, relief assistance, reconstruction and development.

Developing countries should be responsible for the implementation of these strategies at the local level, and developed countries should meet their commitments by taking all necessary measures to assist developing countries in building national capacity to deal with natural disasters and the repercussions of war.

We further stress that, in time of war or natural disaster Governments and relevant authorities must provide United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners with access to those in need of assistance. Measures must also be taken to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

The United Arab Emirates believes in the importance of international solidarity in time of disaster and in the effectiveness of global partnerships in achieving the best results in emergencies assistance, and we attach great importance to fulfilling all our financial commitments to United Nations humanitarian assistance and development bodies. For next year, the Emirates has pledged to donate $1,538,000 to such bodies.

To participate effectively in the coordination of international relief assistance efforts, we established the Dubai International Humanitarian City, one of the largest international centres providing facilities and integrated logistical services to national, regional and international humanitarian organizations and agencies. In 2006, the United Arab Emirates joined the donor countries group, as well as the Donor Support Group, which comprises the world's most active humanitarian donor countries and which serves as an advisory body to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The United Arab Emirates is one of the major contributing countries in the field of humanitarian and emergency relief assistance as well as long-term assistance in many parts of the world. The Government and a group of charitable organizations in our country, such as the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Authority, the Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation, the Mohammed bin Rashid Foundation for Charitable and Humanitarian Works, the Al-Maktoum Foundation and others, extend humanitarian assistance through financial and in kind donations to affected countries, both through cooperation with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and through direct bilateral arrangements with those countries.

At the same time, the United Arab Emirates works with such countries to build national capacity to deal with natural disasters through financing and otherwise supporting programmes, research and other efforts aimed at enhancing their capacity to predict disasters and mitigate their impact and to strengthen national infrastructure, in order to allow them to respond to future disasters.

During the last three years alone, the contribution of the Emirates amounted to $1 billion, allocated to supporting and enhancing the international efforts to assist victims of tsunamis, earthquakes and hurricanes in various parts of the world. Those efforts were in addition to generous donations to the reconstruction of countries and regions affected by armed conflict, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Darfur and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to support and assistance for the Palestinian people and their Government during the humanitarian crisis caused by the cruel, aggressive policies imposed on them by the Israeli occupying forces. Direct assistance by the United Arab Emirates to the Palestinians over the past five years has amounted to more than $1 billion, in addition to other humanitarian assistance extended through United Nations agencies, in order to meet immediate needs, and to rebuild towns destroyed by the continued Israeli assault.

In this regard, the Emirates has doubled its contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for 2008. Up to last August, it had also contributed $80 million to help support the budget of the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, the value of relief and humanitarian projects carried out in Palestine by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Authority, has exceeded $122 million, in addition to other in-kind assistance.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned at the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are deteriorating as a result of continuing Israeli attacks on people, property and infrastructure. We are also concerned at the policy of closures and blockades imposed on the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupying forces and at the denial of access to humanitarian assistance. This poses the threat of a serious humanitarian catastrophe.

We laud the role played by the United Nations and its relevant entities in assisting the Palestinian people, but at the same time we reaffirm the need to compel Israel, the occupying State, to end its attacks immediately, to lift its blockade of the Palestinians and to comply with legal international resolutions and the provisions of international humanitarian law, as well as to resume peace negotiations on the basis of relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We further urge donor countries to increase their assistance to the Palestinian people and Government so as to alleviate their suffering until the end of the Israeli occupation of their territory and the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Until then, we continue to reaffirm our support for the ongoing mandate of UNRWA to provide services for refugees throughout its area of operation. In our view, it is necessary to continue financial support for the regular and emergency activities of the Agency so that it can fulfil its commitments to Palestinian refugees.

Mr. McNee (Canada): At the outset, the Canadian Government and the Canadian people wish to extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims of the recent cyclone in Bangladesh.

Beyond simple goodwill, humanitarian action responds to the acute needs of crisis-affected populations and can restore dignity and hope to people's lives. This is not without challenge or risk. Canada attaches great importance to the efforts of the United Nations to provide leadership and coordination within the humanitarian system. To that end, Canada

welcomes the progress achieved over the past year to strengthen the effectiveness, efficiency and coordination of humanitarian action.

However, the international community can ill afford complacency. We need to look no further than the Darfur region of the Sudan, Chad, Sri Lanka or Afghanistan to measure the toll that conflicts, old and new, continue to take on civilian populations. In Afghanistan, to take but one example, we are reminded that, without security, there can be no reconstruction or democratic development, and that the provision of humanitarian assistance can be challenging.

Achieving real results in the face of conflict is not easy. Moreover, humanitarian action cannot be considered a substitute for political solutions. In addition, the hundreds of thousands of people affected by natural disasters over the past year remind the international community of the importance of making strategic investments in disaster risk reduction in order to minimize vulnerability to natural disasters.

Canada supports the ongoing efforts of Sir John Holmes, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, to strengthen international humanitarian response. The Canadian Government also agrees with him that these efforts should no longer be termed "reform" of humanitarian response. Better coordination, more flexible financing mechanisms and strong humanitarian coordinators in the field should simply be viewed as the best way to conduct international humanitarian action.

The rollout of the cluster coordination system, for example, has proven the system to be an innovative approach to promoting stronger inter-agency cooperation, including cooperation with other humanitarian organizations. Canada welcomes the findings of the recently released cluster evaluation. Where it has been implemented, the cluster approach has helped to improve the identification of gaps in response capacity, contributed to better information-sharing, defined centres of accountability and enabled more effective advocacy.

These are important successes, but challenges remain. We now need to buttress the capacity of cluster leads to ensure they can effectively and consistently play a guidance role. We must address constructively those clusters where performance has lagged behind. Accountability on the part of cluster leads is important to ensure that enhanced coordination efforts bring results to those requiring assistance. In this context, the cluster approach rollout should continue.

Effective coordination relies on having the right people with the right mix of skills and experience available to provide clear leadership. Here, the role of humanitarian coordinators remains vital. Their professional experience, training and skill sets should enable them to provide invaluable leadership for the overall humanitarian presence. Canada urges the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to continue to focus on strengthening the role and capacity of humanitarian coordinators. This will require greater attention in order to ensure real and lasting progress, but it remains central to ensuring effective international humanitarian action.

Canada also supports ongoing efforts to enhance the flexibility of humanitarian funding mechanisms. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is an important example of this commitment. We are very pleased that CERF continues to demonstrate its value as a bridge for providing timely financing for rapid-onset and under-funded emergencies. Over one-third of Member States — developing and developed countries alike — have already contributed to CERF. Canada urges Member States that have not yet done so to consider contributing to this important Fund, while maintaining the level of their commitments to other humanitarian financing tools.

Humanitarian funding mechanisms such as CERF must be guided by coherent and reliable evidence-based needs assessments and analysis. This is at the heart of good humanitarian donorship. Here, OCHA has a critical role to play in order to ensure that the quality of needs assessments is consistent, while timely, since donors rely on them to respond appropriately. United Nations humanitarian actors must work closely together to ensure that efforts are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

(*spoke in French*)

There are some cases, however, where troops possess a unique capacity for action that can be put to use in responding to serious natural disasters. In this regard, OCHA has a key role to play in ensuring that assets are deployed based on assessed needs, rather than being supply-driven, and that such assets are utilized in a manner that respects the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Our goal must be to provide the right assets at the right time, in order to

address genuine needs and gaps in humanitarian response.

More than ever, the commitment of Member States to strengthening humanitarian responses in crisis contexts must include a renewed commitment to ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian workers. Attacks against United Nations and other humanitarian workers increased dramatically during the past 10 years, and they often occur with complete impunity. Once again, Canada urges all Member States which have not done so to sign or ratify the 1994 Convention on Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to Sir John Holmes for the diligence with which he is discharging his responsibilities as Emergency Relief Coordinator.

In conclusion, we as Member States must together continue to elaborate and improve on the tools and strategies needed to help guide international humanitarian action. We must also be in a position to monitor and evaluate humanitarian access and request that States report on their actions when such access has been hindered or denied. To this end, we must all continue to be vigilant. The success of our efforts will ultimately be judged on our ability to protect and help the most vulnerable populations.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): Let me first of all express my Government's deep sympathy for and solidarity with the Government and people of Bangladesh at this very difficult hour.

Norway is a strong supporter of the humanitarian work of the United Nations. We support the Organization's reform agenda and the efforts made to strengthen the humanitarian support system. A lot has been done but, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. I intend to highlight some important issues in this regard.

Norway is deeply concerned about the sexual and gender based violence that each year destroys the lives of thousands of women and girls, as well as men and boys. The continued use of sexual violence as a method of warfare is appalling. Few perpetrators of these abhorrent acts are brought to justice. There must be an end to the impunity for these severe crimes. As guardians of international humanitarian and human rights law it is our collective responsibility to ensure that such acts do not go unpunished.

The response from the international community must be intensified, including by the United Nations, which should take the lead in establishing more effective preventive and protective measures to address sexual and gender-based violence.

The Secretary-General's recommendations for action against sexual violence, contained in his report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2007/643) are important steps in this regard and in the formation of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. The international community has shown its revulsion of sexual violence, including by the adoption of various United Nations resolutions. There is an urgent need for the full implementation of these resolutions.

Access is another major challenge. Access for humanitarian actors to populations in need and the related ability of such populations to receive humanitarian assistance is the prerequisite for all humanitarian operations, as set forth under international humanitarian law. The host Government has the responsibility to ensure rapid, safe and unhindered access and to fully cooperate with the United Nations and other humanitarian actors. The arbitrary denial of such access is an unacceptable practice that places the lives of millions in danger and unnecessarily prolongs their suffering.

Protection is key in this regard. Norway supports the recommendation of the Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and we are looking forward to the debate in the Council tomorrow.

We need to be better prepared to respond to humanitarian emergencies than we currently are. Prevention needs to be placed higher on the agenda of the United Nations. It is widely acknowledged that climate change causes environmental degradation, floods, droughts, hurricanes, involuntary migration, increased urbanization and an explosion in slum-dwelling. We are also faced with prolonged armed conflicts that increasingly affect already vulnerable States and populations.

Prevention efforts will save more lives and cost less, but, the world community seems more willing to pay for the damages than to invest in the cost for

preventive measures. What should be done to mitigate the effects of humanitarian disasters in this changing world?

First, there is a need for a global spokesperson. In this regard Norway welcomes the commitment demonstrated by the Emergency Relief Coordinator in increasing awareness of the importance of better preventive measures. These efforts should be intensified.

Secondly, we need to strengthen our resolve in reforming the international humanitarian response system, including more responsive and appropriate funding mechanism, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund, and the establishment of humanitarian response funds in disaster-prone countries. Adequately funding is key, however, and we urge more Member States and other donors to contribute to these funds. There is furthermore a need for better coordination both among the various United Nations agencies and between the United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors. There is a need to strengthen the functions of the resident and humanitarian coordinators. To this end, Norway is a strong supporter of the cluster approach, which increasingly will contribute to better coordination and prioritization in relation to existing humanitarian needs, and furthermore will serve as an early-warning system for emerging disasters.

Finally, there is still a need for enhanced efforts in capacity development for humanitarian personnel, as well as a need to establish better roster systems with pools of experts from all humanitarian fields that are immediately operational and ready for deployment. Only in this way will we be ready and prepared to deal with the humanitarian consequences when disaster strikes.

Mr. Hussein (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports. They help facilitate our discussion on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, a subject to which Egypt attaches great importance and attention. The reality reflected in these reports raises the concern of the international community about present and future challenges, meaning that it should work effectively to tackle those concerns, as last year witnessed continued increases in the number of disasters and their victims.

We are concerned about the statistics which indicate that the number of climate-related or hydro-meteorological hazard events, such as floods, hurricanes and droughts, had increased dramatically, particularly in Africa, over the last 20 years. That prevailing pattern of increase in frequency and intensity of disasters and in their strength, destructive impact and consequences is a major source of concern. The economic impact of disasters associated with natural hazards has been recognized as a key factor challenging the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Despite the progress made in some long-standing emergencies, according to the improvement of political circumstances in these conflicts and the reduction of violence, the same period continues to witness an increased degeneration of those conflicts, the use of many forms of violence and the steady rate of increase of natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes, cyclones, storms and floods. Such hazards affirm the need to focus on strengthening the capacity of the relevant United Nations entities to provide humanitarian assistance to confront the results of emergency cases on the lives and livelihood of millions of people.

Other conflicts continue to rage throughout the world, contributing to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation caused when approximately 4 million people were forced to flee their homes in 2006. This requires the provision of additional humanitarian assistance to meet their needs. I should like to emphasis the situation in sisterly Iraq, where, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report, the civilian death toll now averages more than 100 per day. An estimated 8 million civilians, including internally displaced persons and refugees to neighbouring countries, are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the deteriorating situation in Somalia requires greater efforts by the international community to provide necessary humanitarian assistance, given the difficult conditions in the country and the international disregard of its need for peace and stability.

Therefore, Egypt emphasizes the urgent need for institutional capacity-building in developing countries so they can effectively and successfully manage natural disasters. That means first strengthening the capacities of countries in the areas of predictability, preparedness and early warning and helping them to eliminate the

effects of the disaster, to rebuild and to return effectively to the path of sustainable development.

Despite the many international documents emphasizing the importance of building disaster response capacities, these remain limited because of a lack of resources and funding, due mainly to the increasing number of natural disasters and their strong effects as a result of climate change and our feeble capacity to deal with it. Greater United Nations efforts are required to coordinate the efforts of international bodies and to promote international multilateral cooperation to respond to these changes.

Therefore, we affirm the importance of the role of donors and the relevant humanitarian organizations, working together with Member States, in investing in strategies aimed at preparedness and swift recovery and in reducing the dangers posed by emergency humanitarian situations. We also agree that the regional dimension is important in responding to crises that require cross-border responses.

In that regard, humanitarian actors must fulfil their specific obligations under national and international humanitarian law when they interact with the citizens — particularly women and children — of the affected countries in which they operate. In addition, they must not become involved in activities such as sexual exploitation and child trafficking, which violate the principles of the United Nations Charter, national laws and international humanitarian law. They must be committed to the rules set out in resolution 46/182, which provides for the role of relevant non-governmental organizations and civil society in activities carried out in countries affected by humanitarian disasters.

Eager to participate in international efforts to cope with the effects of humanitarian disasters and to deliver emergency humanitarian relief, Egypt was among the founders of the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF), providing it with financial and technical support through an Egyptian expert's participation in the Fund's Advisory Group. In that regard, we support efforts to maximize the Fund's effectiveness and help it achieve the goals set out by the General Assembly, in areas where insufficient funding has been made available. We also welcome the role of the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, which was launched in September 2006 to enhance the disaster-preparedness of States that are most vulnerable to disasters. To date, $30 million has been contributed to the Facility.

I should like to express our condolences to the people and the Government of Bangladesh on the losses resulting from the most recent cyclone to strike their country, which caused loss of life and damage to property. In that connection, we call on the United Nations to urgently provide, through CERF or any other relevant initiative, all the assistance necessary to help that sisterly country recover from the effects of this painful disaster.

Recent events highlight the importance of according particular attention to the Secretary-General's report on assistance to the Palestinian people (A/62/82). The tragic realities faced by the Palestinian people — including the destruction of infrastructure, the cutting off of electricity and water, the chopping down and uprooting of trees and the destruction of farmland — have worsened their humanitarian situation and caused a human tragedy. That requires greater efforts by the international community, particularly the United Nations, to intervene to stop those policies and practices and to provide the assistance necessary to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The continued closure operations, the financial crisis and the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues by Israel have had an immediate impact in terms of declining income, increasing poverty, lack of food security and reduced capacity to respond to natural disasters in the occupied Palestinian territories. Therefore, we call on the international community to provide greater financial support in order to prevent further deterioration of the quality of life within the occupied Palestine territories and a further decline of the Palestinian economy, and to meet the increasing economic, social, and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. Continued international efforts to that end should be accompanied by efforts to establish a viable independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must also be supported so it can play its role in the Palestinian territories. Israel must respect the Agreement on Movement and Access, enabling the Palestinian people to interact freely with the outside world, to gain access to humanitarian assistance and to lift restrictions on delivery of such assistance.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted under these agenda items. I should like to make a few comments on the theme.

Over the past year, frequent natural disasters have caused enormous human and economic losses to the Governments and peoples of the countries affected. In 2006, the world endured 427 such disasters, which caused the loss of 23,000 lives, disrupted the daily lives of 143 million people and resulted in economic damage amounting to nearly $20 billion. Since the beginning of this year, the United Nations system has launched as many as 15 humanitarian flash appeals, breaking the record for the same period in previous years. United Nations humanitarian relief work now faces increasingly daunting challenges.

Since emergency disaster relief efforts began in 2004 in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, the leading and coordinating role of the United Nations in international humanitarian assistance activities has gained increasing attention. With broad and in-depth participation in international humanitarian assistance efforts by more and more countries, international organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations, finding ways to further enhance coordination and make full and effective use of resources to maximize the benefits has become a new and arduous task confronting the United Nations.

The Chinese delegation believes that there are two main aspects to enhancing coordination. The first is coordination within the United Nations system. Many United Nations departments and agencies involved in humanitarian assistance activities have different competences, spheres of operation, areas of focus and comparative advantages. They complement one another, but they also have a certain degree of overlap. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen inter-agency coordination, to improve the overall planning of humanitarian activities, to clarify the division of labour and to enhance the efficiency of operations and the cost-effectiveness of the use of resources.

The second aspect is the coordination of relief activities provided by the entire international community. The United Nations plays an irreplaceable role in that respect. We welcome the building of partnerships between the United Nations and relevant countries, international institutions and non-governmental organizations, with a view to achieving better information-sharing and broadening areas of cooperation.

In relief activities, the Government of the affected country bears primary responsibility for organizing, initiating, coordinating and implementing external relief assistance. It should also play a leading role as emergency humanitarian assistance is received, as well as during the transition from relief to development.

When providing humanitarian assistance to affected countries, the United Nations should always adhere to the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. It should respect the sovereignty of those countries, enhance communication and collaboration with their Governments, fully utilize their existing relief mechanisms and be guided by the needs of the affected Governments and peoples in organizing and coordinating international humanitarian assistance.

In recent years, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has worked tirelessly to assess disaster situations, appeal for donations and organize and coordinate emergency humanitarian assistance worldwide. The Chinese delegation expresses its appreciation to the Office and supports the further strengthening of its leading role in coordinating international humanitarian assistance activities. It is our hope that OCHA will continue to cooperate actively with the Governments of affected countries and provide the necessary guidance and assistance to humanitarian actors at all levels.

Since its launch in March 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has provided timely and effective relief assistance in a number of major natural disasters and emergencies, thus playing a positive role in improving resource allocation and utilization and in helping some previously neglected countries and regions hit by disasters to gain access to humanitarian assistance. The Chinese delegation calls upon all Governments, those of developed countries in particular, to contribute generously to the Fund in order to reach the target of mobilizing $500 million for 2008.

Greater international and regional cooperation is one of the effective means to help disaster-prone countries to upgrade their capacity for disaster preparedness, reduction and response. The United Nations should attach importance to facilitating such cooperation; it should offer technical and financial

assistance to highly disaster-prone countries to help them gradually to establish early warning systems and to enhance their capacity to prepare for, mitigate and respond to emergencies, so as to ensure that humanitarian relief helps to address both the symptoms and the root causes of natural disasters.

China, a developing country, is no stranger to natural disasters. We know first-hand what suffering and economic losses natural disasters bring to the affected peoples and countries. My country is hit by various kinds of natural disasters every year, so it is the perennial task of government at all levels to prepare for and mitigate disasters and to provide emergency disaster relief, which has entailed huge economic burdens for the Government.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to international cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance. It has actively participated in international humanitarian relief activities in response to requests by affected countries and to appeals by the international community. This year, the Chinese Government has provided timely bilateral humanitarian assistance, within its capacity, both in cash and in kind, to many affected countries, among them Pakistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Madagascar, the Sudan and Greece, to name just a few.

Those examples fully demonstrate the sympathy, support and concern of the Government and the people of China for affected Governments and peoples. My Government will continue, as always, to support the efforts of the United Nations and the international community in disaster prevention, mitigation and relief and stands ready to help affected countries to overcome disasters and rebuild their homes.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.